

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

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FM AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6729

INFO AMEMBASSY BONN

AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS

AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY OSLO

AMEMBASSY OTTAWA

AMEMBASSY PARIS

CINCLANT

USCINCEUR

USLOSACLANT

USMISSION NATO

USNMR SHAPE

C O N F I D E N T I A L THE HAGUE 4912

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MPOL, NATO, NL

SUBJECT: PROPOSED REDUCTIONS IN NETHERLANDS ARMED FORCES

REF: THE HAGUE 4681

1. SUMMARY: GON IS DIGESTING US, NATO AND SOME DOMESTIC CRITICISM AND IS LIKELY TO TAKE SEVERAL WEEKS BEFORE DECIDING WHETHER ANNOUNCED NAVAL REDUCTIONS WILL BE CARRIED OUT. THOUGH BUDGET PICTURE IS BLEAK, POSSIBILITY THT GON MAY IN THE NED NOT CARRY OUT ANNOUNCED REDUCTIONS IN FULL REMAINS ALIVE. END SUMMARY.

2. THE PLANS FOR NAVAL REDUCTIONS ANNOUNCED BY THE NETHERLANDS PERMANENT MISSION TO NATO LAST AUGUST HAVE ENCOUNTERED HEAVY
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FLAK. OUR BILATERAL EFFORTS BY EMBOFFS WITH RESPONSIBLE MFA

OFFICIALS (THE HAGUE 4258 AND 4558) AND BY AMBASSADOR GOULD WITH FONMIN VAN DER STOEL (THE HAGUE 4681) HAVE LEFT GON IN NO DOUBT THAT USG VIEWS THESE PROPOSED REDUCTIONS AS SERIOUS, NOT JUST FOR MILITARY BUT ALSO FOR POLITICAL REASONS. WE ALSO TOOK ADVANTAGE OF RECENT HAGUE VISIT OF SECRETARY OF THE NAVY (AND FORMER AMBASSADOR TO NETHERLANDS) MIDDENDORF, WHO, IN COMPANY OF AMBASSADOR GOULD, SAW DEF MIN VREDELING SEPT 19 (THE HAGUE 4901). SECRETARY TOOK OCCASION TO STRESS NEED TO KEEP UP COMMON NATO DEFENSE EFFORT IN IMMEDIATE POST-CSCE PERIOD AND IMPORTANCE OF CONTRIBUTION OF EACH INDIVIDUAL MEMBER STATE OF ALLIANCE. IN QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION WITH PRESS, LATER BROADCAST ON DUTCH RADIO, SECRETARY EMPHASIZED NEED FOR VIGILANCE IN FACE GROWING SOVIET NAVAL THREAT. WE GATHER THAT ALL THESE EFFORTS HAVE HAD EFFECT OF DRIVING HOME TO NETHERLANDS POLICY MAKERS REALIZATION THAT WE VIEW PROPOSED REDUCTIONS NOT AS ISOLATED BUDGET MATTER BUT IN CONTEXT OF ALLIANCE RESPONSIBILITIES AND UNDERTAKINGS UNDERLYING POLITICAL STRENGTH AND SECURITY OF NATO COUNTRIES. LEVEL AND PERSISTENCE OF OUR EFFORTS HAVE ALSO LEFT DUTCH OFFICIALS CLEARLY AWARE WE HAVE NOT BEEN MAKING NOISES MERELY FOR RECORD, BUT THAT WE WERE AND CONTINUE TO BE SERIOUSLY CONCERNED ABOUT PROPOSED GON PLANS.

3. OUR BILATERAL EFFORTS IN THE HAGUE TOOK PLACE AGAINST BACKDROP OF SEVERE CRITICISM IN DPC (USNATO 5108), AS WELL AS CRITICAL COMMENTS MADE BY SACEUR, WHICH WAS REPORTED BY DUTCH PRESS. BOTH, WE GATHER, HAVE STRONGLY REGISTERED IN THE HAGUE. RESPONSIBLE MFA OFFICIALS HAVE PRIVATELY COMMENTED TO US ON SEPT 17 DPC MEETING IN A WAY INDICATING ALLIED CRITICISM HAS BEEN EFFECTIVE. SOME LIBERAL POLITICIANS, INCLUDING FORMER DEFENSE MINISTER DE KOSTER, ARE ON RECORD AS BEING UPSET. FLOOR LEADER OF CATHOLIC PEOPLE'S PARTY (SECOND LARGEST COALITION PARTNER) IN LOWER HOUSE OF STATES GENERAL TOLD POLICEMEN THAT HE WAS IMPRESSED BY STRENGTH, FORCEFULNESS AND REASONABLENESS OF ALLIED CRITICISM OF WHICH HE SAID HE WAS AWARE THROUGH HIS OWN SOURCES IN BRUSSELS. IN ADDITION, LUNS LETTER HAS RECEIVED PROMINENT NOTICE IN DUTCH PRESS, WHICH HAS ALSO ADVERTED TO THEME OF NETHERLANDS APPEARING TO RENEGE ON ALLIANCE COMMITMENTS.

4. THERE HAVE BEEN LOCAL REACTIONS WHICH, THOUGH MORE SPECTACULAR, HAVE HAD LITTLE POLITICAL EFFECT. ON SEPT 17, THE DAY FOLLOWING ANNOUNCEMENT OF REDUCTIONS IN QUEEN'S SPEECH OPENING

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NEWS STATES GENERAL, FIVE P-2 NEPTUNES FLE W IN FORMATION OVER BINNENHOF (HOUSE OF PARLIAMENT) AT MINIMUM PRESCRIBED HEIGHT OF 200 METERS. FOR BENEFIT OF THOSE IN THE HAGUE WHO DID NOT HEAR OR SEE THIS SPECTACLE, AND FOR OTHERS IN COUNTRY, DUTCH PRESS NEXT DAY FRONT-PAGED EVENT, ACCOMPANIED IN MANY CASES WITH PICTURES. NAVY AIR ARM SOURCES AT FIRST DENIED IT WAS MEANT AS DEMONSTRATION, ASSERTING THAT FORMATION MANEUVER (NO LONGER PRACTICED IN NETHERLANDS) WAS CARRIED OUT AT REQUEST OF NAVAL

AIR COMMANDER OF ANTILLES, WHERE A FEW NEPTUNES HAVE NORMALLY BEEN STATIONED AND WHERE FORMATION FLYING IS STILL CARRIED OUT. DISCLOSURE THAT REQUEST WAS SEVERAL MONTHS OLD AND THAT ANTILLES COMMANDER COULD NOT RECALL HAVING MADE IT QUICKLY REMOVED VENEER OF THIS EXCUSE. THIS LEFT AN EMBARRASSED NEW NAVY CHIEF OF STAFF VELDKAMP FACING DEFENSE MINISTER VREDELING, WHO IS RELIABLY SAID TO HAVE BEEN HOPPING MAD AND WHO HAS CALLED FOR THROOUGH INVESTIGATION. VELDKAMP POSTION MOREOVER, WAS MADE AWKWARD BY FACT THAT

HE HAD ON DAY OF FLIGHT JUST ASSUMED HIS NEW COMMAND WITH TOUGH SPEECH ONLY THINLY VEILING HIS SEVERE DISAPPOINTMENT WITH STRINGENT GON NAVAL POLICY. FIRST REACTION TO OVERFLIGHT WAS BEMUSED APPROVAL AMONG THOSE PROUD OF ANCIENT DUTCH NAVY TRADITION OF BRAVURA. NO DOUBT STUNT WAS SUBJECT OF SOME SHEERS IN NAVY OFFICERS MESSES AS WELL. NEVERTHELESS, THE GESTURE HAS BEEN WIDELY REGARDED AS SILLY AND INEFFECTIVE. EDITORIAL OPINION HAS BEEN SEVERELY CRITICAL. THE EVENT MAY IN FACT HAVE SET SOME LABOR TEETH EVEN FURTHER ON EDGE ABOUT INSISTING ON CIVILIAN GUIDANCE OVER POLICIES AND CONDUCT OF NAVY, WHICH HAS NEVER BEEN KNOWN FOR LEFTIST SYMPATIES. NAVY CASUALTIES SO FAR ARE THE DEPUTY CHIEF OF THE NAVY'S INFORMATION SERVICE, WHO WAS RELIEVED OF HIS JOB BECAUSE HE DID NOT PASS ON PRIOR KNOWLEDGE OF OVERFLIGHT TO SUPERIORS, AND THE COMMANDER OF THE NEPTUNE SQUADRON, WHO HAS BEEN REPRIMANDED.

5. IN ADDITION STICKERS HAVE MADE THEIR APPEARANCE CALLING ATTENTION TO PLIGHT OF NAVY. RED, WHITE AND BLUE, THEY DEPICT AN ANCHOR WITH A BROKEN CHAIN AND THE CAPTION "YOUR SECURITY--FORGET IT"--PERHAPS AN INTENDED COUNTERPOINT TO THE QUOTE FROM SOLZHENITSYN PREFACING LAST YEAR'S DEFENSE WHITE PAPER: "A FREE MAN DOES NOT KNOW THE VALUE OF THINGS." NAVY PERSONNEL ARE SAID TO BE ORGANIZERS OF STICKER CAMPAIGN. THERE ARE NO SIGNS THESE WILL HAVE ANY APPRECIABLE POLITICAL EFFECT.

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6. COMMENT: PRIME MINISTER DEN UYL, WHO HAS GONE ON RECORD AS SAYING THE GOVERNMENT WILL REPLY IN ABOUT A FORTNIGHT TO NATO SEC GEN LUNS' LETTER, HAS EVIDENTLY DECIDED TO TAKE A LITTLE TIME TO ASSESS WHERE US, ALLIED AND COMESTIC CRITICISM LEAVES THIS ISSUE. NO DOUBT HE WILL BE CONSIDERING POLITICAL EFFECT OF THE CRITICISM ON PARLIAMENTARY CONSIDERATION OF GON PROGRAM, AN EFFECT WHICH IS HARD TO GAUGE AT THIS POINT. HE WILL ALSO HAVE TO WEIGH OPTIONS WHERE ELSE TO CUT SHOULD CABINET DECIDE AFTER ALL NOT TO STRIP NAVAL AIR ARM OF ITS NEPTUNES. MEANWHILE, IN LINE WITH INFO REPORTED BRUSSELS 8499 (NOTAL) AND DESPITE EARLIER LOCAL BRITISH ASSESSMENT REPORTED THE HAGUE 4694, WE HAVE BEEN TOLD BY AUTHORITATIVE MFA OFFICIALS THAT POSSIBILITY IS BY NO MEANS EXCLUDED THAT AT LEAST SOME NEPTUNES WILL BE KEPT FLYING AFTER JAN 1, 1976, THEREBY KEEPING NETHERLANDS IN THE NATO ASW

PICTURE.GOULD

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